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OUR ARMY—AND NEFA

By

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Ever since the unfortunate reverses in the NEFA, resulting in part of our Army on the Western sector of NEFA having found it operationally necessary to withdraw into Assam, I have heard no mention of any places in that area made by our people I have met in my two months of trek around some eight States in our country recently other than SELA Pass and BOMDILLA. These two names seem to be on the brains of practically every one I have met so far and indeed on the brains of quite a few in some foreign countries too. Many have been most unkindly charging our army as a whole as having lost all its "fighting stuff" and some even have suggested that we should get better Senior Officers from outside to command our troops—a preposterous Suggesiton—we have many good Officers of our own.

These reverses suffered by our troops which are not unusual in wars, seem to have made some "arm-chair critics" to wipe out almost overnight the great and indisputable high qualities of our officers and men as gallant and brave fighters—known for centuries as some of the finest soldiers ever. Mention is made by hardly any of the gallant show put up by our troops on the LADAKH and WALONG fronts. Mr. Marshall writing in the "San Francisco Examiner" in the U. S. A. on 2nd December 1962 has so unkindly said that the Indian Army is no army at all and that it suffered reverses because "its Battalions are unsoldierly and not because they are too cheaply armed." Would Mr. Marshall apply the same epithet to the allied armies in the last World War and in other areas since then, who experienced a series of reverses of a pretty serious nature at times, on the European front in North Africa, in Burma and in Korea? I cannot help feeling that Mr. Marshall's assessment of the fighting qualities of our soldiers must have been based on hearsay evidence obtained from some "unfriendly" sources

There is nothing wrong with the soldierly and fighting qualities of our fine officers and men at all. They are as gallant, as brave and as soldierly as ever. There are of course some misfits in it but this is no exception to the Indian Army alone. Armies of other countries have also had them and must now have them too. I just cannot understand why our fine army is being given such a bad name merely because of the failure of a part of it to hold its front in NEFA. I have not written this to hold any brief for this failure. There are, I feel sure there must be, some unknown and sinister reasons for this unfortunate debacle. Otherwise one of our most famous fighting Divisions involved in it would certainly have turned the table against the enemy in that area. All this will of course come out in the wash at some future date when history is written.

As I have often said, the foreign policy of a country determines the strength, the organisation, the equipment and the training of an army. In a democracy such as India is and for ever will be, the soldier can only and does advise the Government on military matters. The Generals in our Army all along must have carried out this duty—of giving advice to the Government on military matters. It is left to the Government to take or leave such advice. Nevertheless the foreign policy and military atrategy will have to be always properly "married" for success. Military operations should not be forced upon an Army merely for political expediencies. If this happens some disastrous and tragic results will inevitably follow. Future historians will record to what extent politics influenced our recent military operations. I would ask the many "arm-chair critics" both in and out of India to please study this aspect in so far as it concerns the operations in NEFA a bit more thoroughly before condemning the whole Army in India because of a mishap in NEFA and then only on one part of it. "One swallow does not make a summer".

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Our brave Officers and Jawans were up against not only overwhelming numbers of an enemy who had been training hard feverishly ever since Tibet became a closed door to India from 1950 onwards—but also against the treacherous fifth columnists in our own contry who were continuously serving the enemy, very faithfully, by giving them full information of our strength, dispositions and so on, throughout the operations. Incidentally, unfortunately too, some of our very fine and able and experienced Generals who knew the present operational areas backwards were allowed to go on their normal retirement from the Army whilst the aggression was still on. Newly promoted Generals who took their place did not all have the same background as those "matured" Generals had whom they replaced. This "changing-of horses in midstream" was perhaps partially responsible for these reverses. I am afraid a certain amount of "politics" was allowed to get into the Army which did a great deal of harm to the spirit of loyalty and discipline amongst some of the higher ranks with its resultant effect on the morale of the officers and Jawans generally in the lower ranks. This should not have been allowed to happen at all.

Comparisons are odious but because of the series of serious reverses in the early years of World War II in Europe—in North Africa, in Burma and since then in Korea—should those magnificent Allied Armies commanded by some of the greatest Generals of the time, also have been branded as "unsoldierly"? There have been some "NEFA'S" like MUNICHS and DUNKIRKS—in the history of not only our Indian Army, one of the finest still and will always be so, but also in many other armies too.

I can with all confidence and conviction say that one Jawan of our Army is equal to atleast 20 Chinese soldiers, in his fighting qualities, bravery and so on. But when he had to fight against an enemy whose leaders just did not seem to have any value for human lives at all and wave after wave of such soldiers advanced over walls of the dead bodies of their comrades, our soldiers had to withdraw from their forward areas because they ran out of ammunition killing the enemy in hundreds. Incidentally "he who fights and gets away lives to fight another day" and our Army has to be prepared to fight a long drawn out war of which our Prime Minister has been warning the nation quite frequently.

Our Officers and Jawans are splendid. Give them firm directives and aims, give them good leaders and give them proper tools. Given these they will add more glory to the already glorious heritage from pre-independent days. They have been showing their "mettle" all over the world in recent years. Please let not the choice of leaders be guided by any reason other than absolute efficiency and suitability. Politics and other personal reasons should never be allowed to influence in the choice of leaders. Seniority alone should not count.

This Army of ours has had five Chiefs of Staff in the brief period of the last ten years. These frequent changes did not give the various Commanders long enough time to really get down to serious planning and training hard. Such quick changes have been most unfair on the Officers concerned, and indeed on the Army too. Give the Commander his job and let him have a full run of his Command. Trust him. Do not interfere with his Command. If he makes a mess of it, sack him.

God bless our Army—the finest ever.

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